

**Board of Selectmen
Town of East Windsor
11 Rye Street
East Windsor, CT**

**MINUTES OF BUDGET ROUNDTABLE MEETING,
December 6, 2010 at 5:30 p.m.**

These minutes are not official until approved at a subsequent meeting.

Members Present: Denise Menard, Mark Simmons, John L. Burnham, Gilbert Hayes, and Richard P. Pippin, Jr.

Members Absent: None

Others: Chief Edward DeMarco, Marie DeSousa, Dick Sherman, Bill Schultz, Cathy Simonelli, John Pica-Sneed, Bill Raber, Kathy Bilodeau, Linda Giuliano, Carol Fox, Laurie Slater, Leslie Hunt, Danelle Godeck, Jack Mannette, Robert Little, Kathleen Pippin, Jamie Daniel, Joseph Sauerhoefer, Tom Stremper, Catherine Cabral, and one other

Press: None

First Selectwoman Denise Menard called the Budget Roundtable Meeting to Order at 5:37 p.m., in the East Windsor Town Hall.

Ms. Menard thanked all who were in attendance. She indicated she would like to start this budget season a different way by including all Boards and Commissions, especially the biggest pieces of the budget, Board of Education and Police Commission, to have an open dialog regarding the upcoming budget. She would like all to be on the same page while trying to formulate proposed budgets, to share ideas on ways to save money or increase revenue, discuss projections, concerns, and goals during this budget season.

Ms. Catherine Cabral had prepared three handouts for everyone in attendance. The handouts were entitled "Revenue Report Town of East Windsor 2010-2011", "Town of East Windsor December 6, 2010 Revenue Worksheet" and "Town of East Windsor December 6, 2010 Budget Worksheet". Ms. Menard began by stating there are no official projections on State funds due to the fact a new administration, however, due to the uncertain economy, this upcoming year is not going to be good. Therefore, the everyone needs to come together and have a conversation regarding this upcoming budget season.

Mr. Jason Bowsza, Board of Finance Member, was unable to attend the meeting, but send an email dated December 1, 2010 and copies made by Ms. Jamie Daniel, Board of Finance Member, were given to all who were in attendance.

Ms. Menard asked everyone that was in attendance to introduce themselves. Those who were in attendance were as follows:

Ms. Leslie Hunt, Board of Education
Ms. Laurie Slater, Board of Education – Human Resources
Ms. Carol Fox, Board of Education – Acting Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Linda Guiliano, Board of Education – Business Manager
Ms. Kathy Bilodeau, Board of Education
Mr. Bill Raber, Board of Education
Mr. John Pica-Sneeden, Board of Education – Chairman
Ms. Cathy Simonelli, Board of Education
Mr. Bill Schultz, Board of Education
Mr. Dick Sherman, Police Commission
Ms. Marie DeSousa, Board of Finance
Chief Edward DeMarco, Police Chief
Ms. Denise Menard, First Selectwoman
Mr. John Burnham, Selectman
Mr. Gil Hayes, Selectman
Mr. Mark Simmons, Deputy First Selectman
Mr. Richard Pippin, Selectman
Ms. Catherine Cabral, Treasurer
Mr. Tom Stremper, Police Commission
Mr. Joseph Sauerhoefer, Police Commission
Ms. Jamie Daniel, Board of Finance
Ms. Kathleen Pippin, Board of Finance
Mr. Robert Little, Board of Finance
Mr. Jack Mannette, Board of Finance – Chairman
Ms. Danelle Godeck, Board of Finance – Secretary

Mr. John Burnham had a question regarding the agenda. Ms. Menard indicated the agenda was filed with the Town Clerk's Office and she read from same. "The purpose of the meeting is to discuss any available projections, ideas, and common goals for the upcoming 2011-12 budget."

Ms. Menard inquired with the members of the Board of Education if they have any input. Mr. John Pica-Sneeden, Chairman of the Board of Education commented that the Board has not started to discuss the budget; therefore, he does not know the direction the district will be going. Ms. Menard asked if he or any other members had any ideas. She remarked that she has been attending CCM Meeting and she has seen many presentations regarding State of Connecticut cuts, but the ECS grants will remain untouched. Mr. Pica-Sneeden agreed. He went on to say that every year, he hears the same thing from the State of Connecticut about how bad it is and it is just going to get worse. According to CABB and CREC, it is a wait and see from the new governor's administration. Ms. Menard commented that the folks from the CCM have indicated that Governor-Elect Malloy is very sensitive to the needs of towns and cities, since he has been a mayor in the past. He will be inheriting a budget from another administration and it will take time for him to review. It is expected sometime in late January or February before any communication comes from the State. With that being said, all departments and agencies need to be aware of the State's position when setting their goals for next year.

Mr. Tom Stremper, Police Commission Member, remarked that the reality was simple. \ The Charter has not changed from last year. The proposed budgets were voted down three times last year and it reverted to the two percent increase. He believes the plan should be around that two percent increase. Mr. John Burnham agreed. Mr. Stempfer also commented that the town needs to try to fund services and other things may have to be cut. Mr. Burnham remarked that everyone in the room remembers last year and the budget being rejected three times by the taxpayers. With declining revenue the taxpayers are faced with the burden of increase taxes. It was the same problem last year, and it will be a very hard sell this year. Mr. Richard Pippin commented that the proposed budget should come up less than the two percent increase and it would probably pass.

Ms. Marie DeSousa, Board of Finance Member, remarked that realistically the needs of the Town need to be met and what services can the Town do without. Maybe what needs to be looked at is government support for nongovernmental agencies, such as, Cemetery Commission, Library, and Historical Commission in order to save money to pay for contractual obligations of the schools, police, and others. She commented about the Warehouse Point Fire Department website which she recently logged onto looking for information about Tony D, she saw a link for the public to donate to the fire department. She was wondering exactly how much was being raised. Mr. Cliff Nelson has done a breakdown of certain organizations budget revenue generated. However, the bottom line is what do we want to give up.

Mr. Mark Simmons wanted to add to the conversation by saying, last year during the budget process, the media portrayed the Board of Selectman as stealing money for vacations and the like. The Board of Selectmen proposed a 1.5% increase at the last referendum which was rejected by the Board of Finance. The Board of Selectmen felt give the voters a choice of cutting certain programs, such as, garbage collection or cutting from other nonessential departments. The media has been broadcasting that everything is costing more, workers compensation insurance and prices at the gas pump. Ms. Menard indicated that luckily the Town has frozen the price of gasoline for this year and next year. The frozen cost of diesel is \$2.36 per gallon plus a \$0.12 per gallon storage fee. Ms. Menard also indicated that automobile, liability, and property insurance premiums also are at a zero percent increase for three years. The workers' compensation premiums are currently low, the Police Department recently received an award in reducing its risk and there is not a signification increase expected. Mr. Simmons inquired about health insurance premiums and Ms. Menard response was the insurance company has indicated a ten to fifteen percent increase which is in range of other governmental agencies. Mr. Simmons noted that elderly have received cuts in Social Security and an increase in payments for Medicare Part B.

Mr. Joseph Sauerhoefer, Police Commission, asked about the unions. Mr. Gilbert Hayes, asked the Board of Education Members if the teachers' union contract has been ratified yet. Mr. Pica-Sneeden indicated it has not. The Board of Education has yet to review same. Mr. Hayes continued that last year it was asked if all departments would submit a zero percent increase and the Board of Education requested a 2% increase considering the NEASC reports. One thing he does remember about the budget process last year was that

There were two different groups at those public hearings, pro-Board of Education or pro-lower taxes, which caused altercations and the budget process got to personal.

Ms. Linda Guiliano, Business Manager for the Board of Education, commented that the Board of Education has been working to keep the costs of insurance and electricity low. Even though personnel have been laid off, expenses are still being paid on those employees, such as, unemployment insurance. Ms. Marie DeSousa remarked that part of the process in reducing staff is paying the unemployment benefits. The factors of laying off staff needs to be shown to the public along with the people assembled in this room. Just because staff is laid off, doesn't necessarily save money immediately. Chief DeMarco commented that negotiations with the police union have been given a six month extension with no increase in salaries through December, 2011. Contract negotiations will resume January, 2012.

Mr. Thomas Stempfner, Police Commission, stated he was a member of the Board Brook Fire Department for thirty-seven years. He took a year off from being involved in public safety for the Town and then became involved with the Police Commission. He did not have a clear understanding of what was involved in operating the police department. He is very impressed with the job the administration has done and the value of the services which are performed. There are always ways the cut money out of the budget and people tend to look at the big numbers, rather than looking at the little expenses and if a lot of little expenses are cut, it will make a big difference. He has done ride-a-longs with a police officer and the size of the personnel is at bare minimum. During these tough times, we need to provide the Town with quality police service.

Mr. John Burnham and Mr. Richard Pippin, members of the Board of Selectmen, agreed this year is going to be a rough year and probably worse than last year. Mr. Pippin has heard rumors of the Town charging sales tax, which if that was considered the public would be in an uproar. Mr. Burnham inquired about revenue increasing due to the Route 140 Sewer Project. Ms. DeSousa remarked that recent settlements which have been made will not be made in the coming year. Ms. Menard confirmed those settlements and remarked legal expenses vary year to year. One of her concerns is that she does not foresee revenue increasing or the grand list increasing in the next year or two due to the decrease in building because of the slow economy. She agreed that tax collection has been increasing due to the aggressive tax collection of delinquent bills, however, that may slow down because some delinquent tax payers are not paying those bills. The Town could pursue auctioning property of those tax payers who refuse to pay their delinquent tax bills, but is that an option the Town is willing to pursue? State funding is going to be decreased and everyone is going to be touched because of it. Ms. Cabral commented about the WPCA account that will be \$350,000 less than last year and that any reductions in State funding will be difficult to make up. The Town did have higher tax assessments, however, she does not expect revenues to increase because businesses have downsized. She gave an example that the assessment on commercial trucks may be up, but there are not many businesses due to the slow economy. The budget gap is going to have to be closed in some sort of way either by lower expenditures or increasing taxes

to increase revenue. Mr. Hayes inquired about the WPCA account. Ms. Cabral indicated it had to be reimbursed to the Town. The Town paid the debt originally. North Road Sewer Project had additional debt higher than what was projected in this year's budget.

Ms. DeSousa spoke about the public hearings held last year regarding the budget; there was a lot of talk about regionalizing the schools to save money. Ms. Linda Guiliano, Business Manager for the Board of Education, indicated that process would take two to three years before regionalization could take place. Ms. DeSousa thought that Mr. Tim Howes, the Superintendent of Schools at that time, was looking into consolidation with Windsor Locks to save the money. Mr. Burnham wanted to dispel that rumor, Mr. Howes never did same. Ms. Menard questioned how long it would take to reap the benefits of regionalizing the school districts. Ms. Guiliano indicated it takes three years and the State has to approve of same before it can be accomplished. Ms. Menard reiterated it had never been researched. However, on the Town side, the Town is looking into regionalizing some of the services with surrounding towns. For instance, recently she has been working with the Town of Somers to share animal control services. At the next Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting, it will be discussed further regarding the contract and agreement with the Town of Somers to begin sharing animal control services beginning in January. She realizes it is a baby step at this point, but she hopes it will save money and may open the door for other services. In essence, this will be an experiment to see if sharing services will be beneficial to both towns.

Mr. John Burnham suggested a target this year of a two percent increase in spending. Mr. Joseph Sauerhoefer suggested a zero increase across the board. Mr. Thomas Stempfer indicated that certain budgets cannot operate on a two percent increase and nonessential departments may have to sustain cuts. Contractual obligations have to be met. Some departments are currently under funded and cannot survive. Mr. Burnham indicated that realistically this year's budget plus two percent will be the numbers that all departments are going to have to work with. The question will remain how the town divides that additional two percent among all of the departments. Ms. Guiliano and Chief DeMarco caution decreasing personnel. Ms. DeSousa inquired what would be considered nonessential departments. She hopes that Park and Recreation will not be one of those considered nonessential. Mr. Gil Hayes added that Park and Recreation is not just for the younger residents of the town, but also provides family activities. Mr. Stempfer insisted the bottom line the taxpayers will decide what quality of services they want.

Ms. Jamie Daniel, Alternate Member of Board of Finance, remarked that last year during the budget process, it was discussed having an exit poll to gather information from the voters. The questionnaire would ask if they voted against the proposed but, what were the reasons why. The questionnaires would be reviewed by the Board of Finance in order to serve the taxpayer more efficiently. Ms. DeSousa commented the public needs to speak at the public hearing. Ms. Menard reviewed the budget process and how the process is open to the public. Mr. Dick Sherman, Police Commission, commented that he has been involved with Town for a long time. He understands that people are busy and do not have the time to attend the Town Meetings. He would like to see the Town do

a better job in getting the word out to the public so they can understand how departments work and how much it cost to run those departments. The word does not get out. The only information the public sees during the budget season are the voting signs. He agrees with the exit poll questionnaire and getting feedback from the voters. Ms. Menard agreed that getting the information to the voters needs to be done better. The Town maintains the website and bulletin board. Previously the Town would send a newsletter and the Board of Education would send a newsletter, but due to budget constrictions, the newsletters were cut. Ms. DeSousa suggested putting the newsletter on the website. Mr. Stempfer commented that an ear has to be listening and he thinks that people are so stressed out during because of the economy. They do not trust the Federal or State Governments and have no control over those budgets, but feels they have control or say in the Town Government.

Ms. Danelle Godeck, Board of Finance Secretary, began by stating that they can discuss regionalization, negotiating with the union contracts, but the bottom line and the big question is still the same, those essential departments need to have coverage to provide the services to the Town. If those departments are cut to bare bone personnel, overtime costs are going to be incurred. Other services are going to be needed to be cut so those essential departments can be funded. She suggested looking at garbage disposal. Many surrounding towns do not provide garbage disposal. She stated that during the upcoming budget hearings, she will hear the same people she heard last year. It is her belief that the public needs to be shown exactly how much it costs to provide services to the Town. Mr. Joseph Sauerhoefer remarked that all of this has to start with everyone working together and not pointing fingers at each other. The public needs to know as much information as possible so they can formulate their opinions. Ms. Godeck indicated there are ways to cut the budget. Ms. Menard is hoping the public will become more involved.

Mr. Sauerhoefer wanted to compliment the Board of Education for a great job they do everyday. He has a three year old daughter who has totally changed since going to school. He lets everyone know what a good job they do. He says the Board of Education gets a bad rap. Ms. Kathy Bilodeau, Board of Education, mentioned that she believes the citizens of East Windsor do not know exactly how much it costs to run the school system. She also believes the public needs to be better informed during the budget process. Ms. Leslie Hunt, Board of Education, agrees. She believes that everyone at this meeting has the best interest for the Town of East Windsor and to work toward a common goal. However, during the budget process, the Board of Education is accused of spending a lot of money. She believes that they all should have a common goal and agree on a unified message and not point fingers at each other. Mr. Stempfer agreed. He has heard around town that the Board of Finance is an embarrassment and the members hate each other. They all need to work together.

Ms. Kathleen Pippin, Board of Finance, indicated she was proud to be a member of the Board of Finance. The members of the Board come from different backgrounds and have different opinions. The people of East Windsor are aware of the tough economic times and choices which have to be made. This will be a tough year, but she believes the town is up to the challenge. She has received emails from people indicating how rotten

the Board of Finance is and why they hate this Town. Ms. DeSousa inquired what the reasons were. Ms. DeSousa hopes this budget seasons is different than the last and she is also embarrassed with the behavior of the Board of Finance, including her own. Mr. Bill Schultz, Board of Education, also commented about the budget process of last year. He also asked the Board of Finance members to work together to make the process easier.

Ms. Cathy Simonelli, Board of Education, agreed with Ms. Leslie Hunt's comments of earlier indicating that a list of common goals that all departments agree upon. Ms. Menard also liked the idea. Mr. Robert Little, Board of Finance, remarked that the communications to the public was not correct. A lot of people, who opened up their tax bills, did not realize a two percent increase actually meant a ten percent tax increase. Ms. Simonelli disagreed indicating it was posted in the newspaper. Ms. Godeck agreed.

Ms. Menard started making a list of the common goals. It was agreed one of the goals should be how to communicate the proper figures to the public. Ms. Godeck indicated that graphs and grids may be too complicated for the public to understand and the presentation to be simplified to stop the confusion. Ms. Menard agreed. Ms. Cabral agreed also and suggested that the Board of Selectmen, Board of Education, and Board of Finance should have the exact same formats for their presentation at the public hearing to lessen the confusion.

Mr. Jack Mannette, Board of Finance Chairman, addressed the meeting. He indicated that looking forward; last year's process needs to be examined. The taxpayers spoke volumes last year by rejecting the proposed budget three times. What needs to be figured out is what exactly a two percent budget increase means to the average tax bill. Last year, a two percent increase really meant a 10% tax increase. With discussions of revenue declining from the State, the tax increase may be significant. All of these figures need to be somehow figured and charted so the public can understand if the budget increases a certain percent; tax will be increased by a certain percent. The Town has to look to see if it can live with less. If a two percent spending increase is proposed, it will probably get shot down. As a group, we have to be prepared to go lower than the two percent. He has reviewed the 2009-2010 budget of 31 million dollars, but only spent 30 million dollars. He explained that the Town served the public and spent less. He indicated he would need all departments, including the police and Board of Education, to work together to meet that goal.

A discussion was held regarding the Charter and what it reads regarding the budget process and deadline dates.

Ms. Godeck reiterated that the public hears different scenarios. No one wants higher taxes; however, it is unavoidable if services are not going to be cut. Ms. Menard gave an example of how the Board of Selectmen was thinking of cutting trash and bus loads of people attended a hearing upset about the proposed cuts. The public will get involved when their services are cut, however, if they do not want higher taxes.

Mr. Mannette tried to explain if there is no spending increase and revenues are projected to be approximately 20% lower than last year, it is quite possible a tax increase may be required. He would like the Treasurer figure out different scenarios regarding tax and mill rates so everyone knows what the consequences will be. Ms. Menard agreed with Mr. Mannette and indicated she and Mr. Mannette should schedule a meeting and discuss mutual goals of the Boards. They agreed to meet on December 7, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. She noted a Board of Selectmen Regular Meeting is scheduled for December 7, 2010 and at that meeting it will be discussed having a Special Meeting scheduled to discuss budget procedures and guidelines in depth.

Ms. Cathy Simonelli, Board of Education, agreed with having the Treasurer come up with the scenarios; however, she was a little confused about another tax increase since last year the reasoning behind such a high tax increase was because the general fund was short approximately a million dollars which had to be made up. She doesn't understand why this year another tax increase may be necessary. Ms. Menard confirmed that the million dollar shortfall was only last year. It was then discussed that it is too early to give concrete revenue and grand list figures.

Ms. Menard began making a list of goals which all of the Boards can agree upon. The first goal is to format budget presentations all the same way.

Ms. Jamie Daniel left the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Ms. Cabral agreed with Ms. Menard in making all budget presentations formatted the same way, including the Board of Education. Ms. Godeck agreed that common goals for all of the Boards to be unified in their presentations. Even if there are some disagreements between Board Members, the majority rules and negative comments should be kept at a minimum.

A discussion was held regarding ways to get the public input. Suggestions of having exit polls, questions on the ballot, or even a suggestion box at the Town Hall. Ms. Menard indicated she has been working with the First Selectwoman of Somers, which has been using an online survey. It was also suggested using the Reminder Press in attempting to get public input on the budget process or maybe attaching something to the school newsletter. Another suggestion was using a new website, Patch.com, which would be free to get the word out to the public.

Ms. Menard indicated she would discuss all of these ideas with the Board of Selectmen at the Special Meeting which will be held to discuss the budget process and guidelines. Ms. Godeck agreed all of the ideas are good ideas and a great start to the upcoming budget process. She commented on getting the number projections from the Treasurer which will help the process along.

The meeting ended at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise M. Piotrowicz
Recording Secretary